

Don't Overdo Worrying about Overdues!

By Pamela S. Bacon

At the end of the school year, my overdue count was staggering—410 books missing in action (yikes!). Not all of these overdues were mine. (Our circulation system carries over books from the junior high. Much to the dismay of many a senior, the system even includes books long since forgotten from elementary school!) I had to admit, though, the bulk of the overdues were MIA's from our high school library media center shelves. Granted, we have almost 3,000 students . . . but 410 overdues was still a whopping figure, no matter how you looked at it.

The more I thought about it, I realized I could reduce the number of overdues without assessing hefty fines or assigning lifetime detentions—if I was willing to change my entire non-traditional library media specialist philosophy. All I had to do was change every mindset and belief I had about creating and maintaining a positive library media center environment. If I could just make myself follow the 10 tips below . . . I knew my future would hold fewer overdues. But should I be careful what I wished for?

Tip #1

Whatever you do, do *not* encourage students to check out books—especially high-priced reference books. Work especially hard to keep all shelves completely full. Since shelving books will no longer be a time-consuming task, spend that extra time dusting your precious collection.

Tip #2

Do not have hours before school, after school, or at lunch—or any other time that might possibly be convenient for students to check out books. Keep students out to keep books in!

Tip #3

If a student asks for a book you don't have, never offer to order a copy—and don't borrow one from another library. These habits encourage more reading and, as a result, more checkouts.

Tip #4

No matter the question . . . always say no first. Say yes only when forced to do so. Like the Capital One® commercial, no is always the answer. For those of you who have a difficult time saying no, practice aloud on your way to work.

Tip #5

Never allow a student to renew a book. Snatch the book back immediately from the eager reader and reshelve carefully (after dusting, of course!).

Tip #6

Do not, under any condition, agree to sponsor a book club. Talking about books and authors will make students want to read (i.e., check out books) more! If your principal forces you to hold a book club, always hold your meetings at inopportune times. (6:00 a.m. on Monday morning or 5 p.m. on Friday nights have shown to be inconvenient for sleepers and daters).

Tip #7

Always frown when students come into the library media center. (Thick glasses perched on the end of the nose are also a nice feature if you can manage it.) Students who are intimidated are less likely to approach the counter and, inadvertently, check out a book.

Tip #8

Practice saying “shhh” with as much resentment as you can manage. If positive noise (or any enjoyable activity) is heard in the vicinity of the library media center, other students may work up the courage to enter (i.e., check out a book).

Tip #9

Do not allow browsing . . . students may stumble upon an author, book, or (heaven forbid!) an entire series!

Tip #10

Whenever a student asks for help finding a book, tell him or her without hesitation that it's checked out. If a student can't find a book, then it can't be checked out!

Note: Always do the opposite of Tips 1–10 to promote a positive academic climate in which students want to read!

Obviously, you've figured out by now that no practicing library media specialist would ever follow these 10 tips. But the more I thought about it, the more I decided that overdues weren't so bad after all. Didn't the fact that students were reading more than ever (my circulation counts were skyrocketing) make up for the lost books? Were books that were currently overdue making the rounds this summer between friends? I certainly hope so. Sure, overdues still bother me—but, given the alternative, I wouldn't have it any other way!

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Bacon, P.S. (2005). Don't overdo worrying about overdues! *Library Media Connection*, 24(3), 45.